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Directors Chester and DeBeaussaert Discuss Threat of Invasive Species

Appearing before a joint meeting of the House and Senate Natural Resources committees, Department of Environmental Quality Director Steven E. Chester and Office of the Great Lakes Director Ken DeBeaussaert outlined the threat that aquatic nuisance species pose to the Great Lakes, and measures that must be taken to stop their continued introduction into our waters.

Director Chester used the opportunity to announce that there are ballast water treatment methods available which could be used by ocean-going vessels to prevent introductions of aquatic invasive species into the Great Lakes. Public Act 114 of 2001 required the DEQ to make a determination on whether there is ballast water treatment that could be used by ocean-going ships that would adequately address the safety of the vessel, crew and passengers, and would be effective in the prevention of introducing new aquatic nuisance species into the Great Lakes.

"The technology exists, and it is time that the ships using our Great Lakes take on the responsibility for protecting these natural treasures," said Director Chester. "Ballast water is an all too common carrier for invasive species that can devastate the Great Lakes, and we must take action now to address it."

As part of his determination, Director Chester set January 1, 2007, as the date by which ballast water treatment could be used by all ocean-going vessels operating on the Great Lakes.

"Invasive species pose a serious and ever growing threat to our Great Lakes and their native wildlife," said Director DeBeaussiaert. "While our country spends billions of dollars dealing with the effects of invasive species, Michigan still has an opportunity to prevent this issue from growing into a greater crisis affecting our multi-billion dollar Great Lakes sport and commercial fishery."

Aquatic nuisance species are waterborne, non-native organisms that threaten the diversity or abundance of native species, the ecological stability of impacted waters, or that threaten commercial, agricultural, and recreational activity dependent on waters of the state.

The harm caused by invasive species such as the zebra mussel, Eurasian water milfoil, round goby, and spiny water flea in the Great Lakes is widespread. For example, utilities annually spend tens of millions of dollars to combat zebra mussel infestations, which clog water intake valves. Milfoil chokes many waterways, requiring either expensive "mowing" of the weed or chemical treatment that has unintended consequences.

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